



COVID IMPACT ON EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN AN IT INDUSTRY AND THE REMEDIATION PLAN

Ashok Anand Ramakrishnan¹, Dr. B. Balamurali², Dr. S. Jacob Pratabaraj³

¹Research Scholar, Department of Business Administration, Annamalai University, India

²Associate Professor, Department of Business Administration, Annamalai University, India

³Associate Professor (Sabbatical) and Asst. Vice Principal – Operations, Sultanate of Oman

ABSTRACT

The need for the study of COVID Impact among the Employee of IT Industry had been considered as very critical at this moment. Any IT industry believes in the principle of 4Ps namely PROCESS, PEOPLE, PARTNERS and PRODUCTS. The Process deals with the flow of business in way of operating to meet the client needs. The PRODUCTS deals with the outcome of the PROCESS to satisfy the need of the Customer. The PARTNERS are the souls of winning the business who are the customers / clients who would purchase our products and in turn pays for our income. The PEOPLE are the highly critical component who are the hearts of the EMPLOYEE who work out the requirements at all levels and converts the expectation into realized benefits to organization and to us. Hence this study deals with how the COVID had impacted the employees of IT Industry and the recommended a remediation plan to act upon the critical situations wisely well in advance.

Keywords: Employee Engagement, COVID, IT Industry, Strategy, Tactical, Operations, Remediation Plan, Customer/ Clients, Leadership, Motivation, Mentoring, Analytics

Cite this Article: Ashok Anand Ramakrishnan, B. Balamurali and S. Jacob Pratabaraj, Covid Impact on Employee Engagement in an IT Industry and the Remediation Plan, *International Journal of Management (IJM)*, 11 (3), 2020, pp. 725–734.
<https://iaeme.com/Home/issue/IJM?Volume=11&Issue=3>

1. INTRODUCTION

The journey we came across in recent past had taught us a very valuable lessons that money, position, social status, education, authority is of no use. This is mainly seen in the Employees working in the IT industries where the Employee Engagement had been deprived off gradually. Previously the study was made within the organisation that contributes to the factor of causing the diminishing effect of Employee Performance. A careful study had been made to understand

not only from inside of the organisations but also from the outside mainly due the Impact of the COVID amidst the Employee in an IT Industry.

2. METHODOLOGY

The Employee Engagement due to Impact of COVID is considered as the DEPENDANT VARIABLES (Y) and the approach all the way long to address the IMPACT are considered as INDEPENDENT VARIABLES (Xs). During the study it was found that some of the independent variables namely Xs paved way for decreasing effect for Employee Engagement due to Impact of COVID. However, on interestingly some of the independent variables namely Xs tend to improve the Employee Engagement due to COVID Impact as well. The remediation plan of actions directly contributes to the portions for independent variables which in turn when followed and practiced stringently would lead to the achievement of Higher Level of Employee Engagement.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. Who is an Employee

Employees who are engaged in their work and committed to their organizations give companies crucial competitive advantages—including higher productivity and lower employee turnover. Thus, it is not surprising that organizations of all sizes and types have invested substantially in policies and practices that foster engagement and commitment in their workforces. Indeed, in identifying the three best measures of a company's health, business consultant and former General Electric CEO Jack Welch recently cited employee engagement first, with customer satisfaction and free cash flow coming in second and third, respectively.

3.2. What is Employee Engagement

Employee Engagement has been a hot research topic among positive psychologists, human resource researchers and management practitioners in recent years. Because of the emergence of positive psychology, work engagement, as a positive aspect of psychology, is increasingly popular in occupational health psychology. Engaged employees have a sense of energetic and effective connection with their work activities and see themselves as able to deal well with the demands of their job (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Due to the needs of business practice, many consulting organizations are conducting continuous research on employee engagement by surveying employers and employees.

3.3. The Concept of Employee Engagement

In the ISO 9001–2015 standard, the principle “Employee engagement” is formulated implies the emergence of motivation, active participation, and involvement of workers in all production processes, which should favourably influence on the growth of labour efficiency. People begin to work effectively only if they are passionate about work. To achieve this, it is necessary to create conditions for the maximum interest of employees in their work. It is believed that employee satisfaction with his work gives rise to his loyalty to the employer, loyalty forms engagement, which, in turn, allows improve the quality of products.

3.4. Impact of Employee Engagement

Employee engagement has emerged as one of the greatest challenges in today's workplace. With complexities and stringent regulations in many organizations, employee engagement will continue to challenge organizations in the future. This aspect challenges management because engagement is a critical element in maintaining the organization's vitality, survival, and profitability. Organizations that have highly engaged employees have greater profits than those

that do not. Organizations with highly engaged employees experience increased customer satisfaction, profits, and employee productivity.

3.5. Habits of IT Employees

IT Employees are generally interested in developing better habits to increase their workplace productivity and well-being but have difficulties identifying concrete goals and actionable strategies to do so. In several areas of life, such as the physical activity and health domain, self-reflection has been shown to be successful at increasing people's awareness about a problematic behaviour, motivating them to define a self-improvement goal, and fostering employee engagement. This helps IT Employees with a better trade-off between the cost and value of workplace self-reflection and increase long-term engagement.

3.6. Why Engagement is Important

David Guest (2009) suggested that:

Employee engagement will be manifested in positive attitudes (for example job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and identification with the organization) and behaviour (low labour turnover and absence and high citizenship behaviour) on the part of employees; and evidence of perceptions of trust, fairness and a positive exchange within a psychological contract where two-way promises and commitments are fulfilled.

Employee engagement is important to employers because a considerable amount of research indicates that high levels of engagement result in behaviours such as maximizing discretionary effort, taking initiative, wanting to develop, or aligning actions with organizational needs.

These deliver a range of organizational benefits, for example:

- Higher productivity/performance – engaged employees perform 20 per cent better than the average (Conference Board, 2006).
- Lower staff turnover – engaged employees are 87 per cent less likely to leave (Corporate Leadership Council, 2004).
- Improved safety (Vance, 2006).

3.7. Drivers of Engagement

The following drivers of engagement were listed by MacLeod and Clarke (2009):

- Leadership which ensures a strong, transparent, and explicit organizational culture.
- Engaging managers who offer clarity, appreciation of employees' effort and contribution.
- Employees feeling that they can voice their ideas and be listened to.
- A belief among employees that the organization lives its values

3.8. Influence of Rewards for Employee Engagement

The strategy should also cover career development opportunities, and how individuals can be given the guidance, support, and encouragement they need if they are to fulfil their potential and achieve a successful career with the organization, in tune with their talents and aspirations.

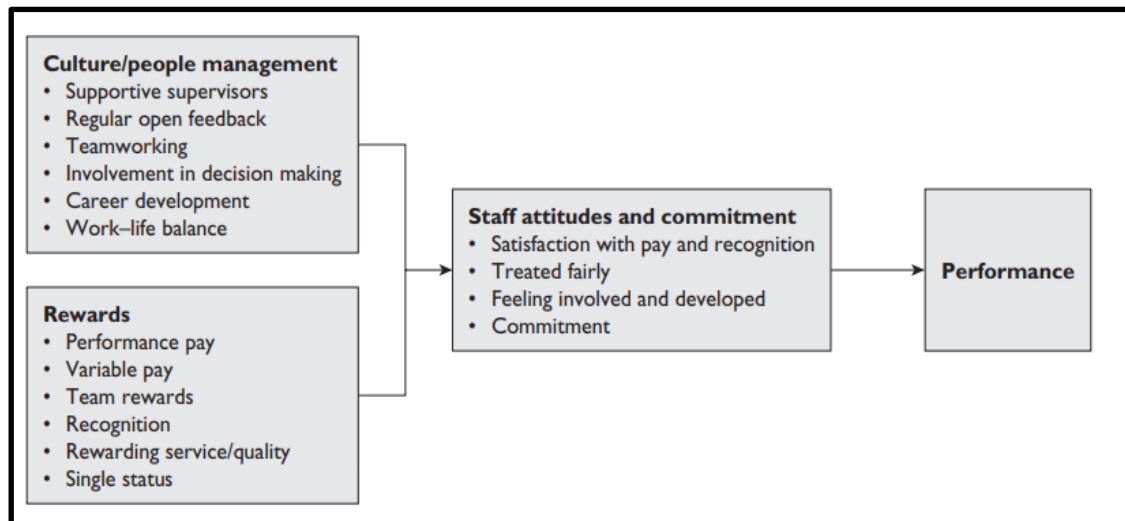


Figure 1 How reward policies influence performance through engagement

3.9. Employee Engagement: Key Expectations

3.9.1. *Expectation No.1: The meaning of employee engagement*

Engagement takes place when people are committed to their work and motivated to achieve high levels of performance.

3.9.2. *Expectation No.2: Why engagement is important*

Engagement is important to employers because a considerable amount of research indicates that high levels of engagement which result in behaviours such as maximizing discretionary effort, taking initiative, wanting to develop, and aligning actions with organizational needs deliver a range of organizational benefits, for example higher productivity/performance.

3.9.3. *Expectation No.3: The factors that affect engagement*

Engagement will be affected by the quality of work and job design, the quality of life provided by the working environment, and the quality of leadership and the reward system.

3.9.4. *Expectation No.4: Methods of enhancing engagement*

Financial and nonfinancial rewards can enhance engagement, but providing intrinsic motivation through the work itself, improving the work environment and ensuring that line managers play their part are equally if not more important.

4. COVID IMPACT ON EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN AN IT INDUSTRY AND THE REMEDIATION PLAN

4.1. Factors Affecting Employee Engagement

COVID had turned the situation upside down of the entire world. To understand better we need to focus on the factors affecting the Employee Engagement as follow.

4.1.1. *Professional Factors*

The employee had been pushed to a state of perplexing in which the fear of losing the job or transition of work across the organisation had created an imbalance in the present system.

4.1.2. Personal Factors

The personal factors include on the aspects of time commitment made on the family needs, futuristic visions for the family, children's studies, elderly care, friends, and others support and assistance. All these aspects are made to turmoil the uncertainty of the situation.

4.1.3. Emotional Factors

The results that were getting shared in the news, dailies, other sources had created a concrete tension in the mental state and proportionately increases the stress level in the output of the work performed.

4.1.4. Financial Factors

The aspects like EMI, bank balance, financial stability for the family and dependants had been a big question mark due the COVID there by creating a chaos inside an employee thus affecting the performance of the delivery to the customers there by diminishing the success of the Employee Engagement.

4.1.5. Social and Economical

The COVID impacted the Employee Engagement heavily not only due to the spread on pandemic but also the changes in social and economic aspect because the ambiguity and insecurity due to these factors were very high thus impacting the Employee Engagement.

4.1.6. Psychological Factors

The news spread across the community is so fast in such a way that the fear due to COVID gripped the people as to when they or their family members will get affected leads to a drastic weakening performance in the Employee Engagement.

4.2. Levels of Impact

The factors discussed above had contributed in such a way at various levels the devastation had been incurred into the society.

Table 1 Level of Impact

Levels of Impact	Description of Level of Damage	Possible Output	Treatment Advised
CRITICAL	Employee is fully disengaged.	Not ready to take any action in next immediate steps.	Needs strong and intensive care of Mentoring and dedicated Motivation.
HIGH	Employee is not fully but highly disengaged.	Unable to take any further quick action in next immediate steps.	Needs intensive care of Mentoring and dedicated Motivation.
MEDIUM	Employee is moderately disengaged.	Can be made ready to take any action in next steps provided required support to be imparted to the Employee.	Needs periodic Mentoring and Motivation.
LOW	Employee is sparingly disengaged but the outcome is not that much disturbed. With lesser mentoring the employee can be made for next course of actions.	Not that much impact on output but may lead to dip in Employee engagement if left unattended.	Needs proactive system of Mentoring and Motivation.

4.3. Stages of Impact

The factors discussed above had contributed in such a way at several stages the destruction had been incurred into the organisation.

Table 2 Stages of Impact

Stages of Impact	Description of Stage of Damage	Symptoms Seen in Output	Cure Recommended
Preliminary Mode	Initial Stage of disengagement.	→Loss of interest. →Degradation in deliverables. →Slippages in Schedules.	→Periodic mentoring. →Regular Cadences and Governances. →Constant Check-up on Employee Morale.
Intermediary Mode	Next Stage to Preliminary mode of disengagement.	→Lack of responsibility. →Drastic reduction in performance. →Poor outcomes.	→Engaging Employee with cross skilling. →Creating pleasant environment. →Close watch on Employee Emotions.
Advanced Mode	Highest Stage of disengagement.	→No Accountability. →Poor stakeholder handling. →Lack visioning.	→Providing Employee with higher level of Motivation. →Creating an enhanced ambience for the Employee. →Stern Motivation from High Level leadership team.

4.4. Organizational Changes Due to Covid

The spin of the COVID had changed the approach of operation inside the organisation as well that are enlisted as follows:

4.4.1. Business Units / Departments Functioning

The business units and the departments had decided to go with the operating at Online based. This was initially considered as challenges but when forced to adopt by COVID situation the functions started realizing the basic principles of operating from the remote instead of the hands and feet work mode.

4.4.2. Infrastructure Optimisation

The Organization was so reluctant in agreeing to the ideas of the employee working in the remote which at many a times challenging task between the manager and the employee. Those organisations who were already in the culture of working remotely had navigated this situation quickly and easily. For those organisations who are consistent in making the employee to be present in the office had faced a tough time. The forced COVID situation had rather taught them the adopting to the practice of remotely working. The Organisation were able to realize a better cost effective in the latter days also.

4.4.3. Client Perspective

Client plays a major role in the business which in turn changes the success of an organization evidently. Client was very strong on few areas that are discussed as follows.

- Productivity is non-negotiable.
- Quality at any point of time cannot be compromised. Security should be 100% adhered to Compliant.
- Trust cannot be digressed.

- Deliverables need to be stick on to as per Schedules.
 - Deliverables are to be made at appropriate time schedules.
 - However, considering the COVID pandemic situation the schedule of delivery could be reconsidered.

The clients predominantly were so encouraging to their vendors in terms of the above perspectives that not only gives confidence to the supplier organisation but also improves the morale of the Employee Engagement.

4.5. Employee Behaviour During the Period Covid

The behaviours of Employee had been found changing due to the impact of COVID that incurs both advantageous and disadvantageous Employee Engagement as discussed below.

Table 3 Employee Behaviour During the Period Covid

Parameters	Advantages	Disadvantages
Work from Home / Remote Working Mode	→ Union with family → Care taking of family and dependants → Flexible Login / Logoff	→ Disconnect from organisation → Lack of supervision from office → Inappropriate timing leads to more working hours.
Cost / Expenses	→ Considerable amount saving due to leaving rented apartments and staying at native places. → Outside or canteen food expenses got reduced. → Transportation or travel cost had been reduced provisionally.	→ Cost for smart gadgets for accessing work got increased. → Cost due to Internet and wireless environment got increased considerably. → Cost for medicines and proactive healthcare pertaining to COVID impact got increased rapidly.
Health and Well being	→ Staying at home increases the safety and there by improves the morale of the employee. → Family and dependant were kept under safer environment increases the employee longevity towards the employee engagement. → Lesser chance of getting impacted by COVID leads to improved Employee Engagement.	→ Due to lack of connectivity with organization, the deliverable would have impact. → Longer time spent per day at work rapidly increases the mental stress there by affecting the Employee Morale. → Fear of COVID for self, family and dependants would lead to immense degrading in Employee Engagement.

4.6. Remediation Plan

To address the gap between the Employee emotional disputes and the COVID Pandemic situation a Remediation Plan had been devised to study cautiously and to recommend a strong and sophisticated plan of action. The remediation plan includes the critical elements that would be minimal support to face any challenges in the future:

Table 4 Remediation Plan

S.No.	Scope for Improving Employee Engagement	Category	Remediation Plan of Action
1	Client Specific	BUSINESS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Always keep the work client centric. 2. Understand the requirements from Customer with full clarity. 3. Keep the client informed about the shortcoming well in advance.
2	Continued Business Support	BUSINESS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Make sure for the necessary work environment is always set at operating conditions. 2. Inform to your manager or immediate supervisor when facing any crisis and raise the flag well in advance. 3. Must have proper back up during the case of failure of the systems.
3	Resilience	BUSINESS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Need to have strong plan to come back to normal setup from failures. 2. Must have proper and sufficient review and approvals before going for live deliverables to clients. 3. Proper and periodic communication to all stakeholders including organisation and customers.
4	Family Care and Protection	PERSONAL	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Must have close watch for family and dependants for their health and wellbeing. 2. Regular and periodic health check to be taken care for the family and dependants. 3. Organising the safe environment and strong emotional ambience to the family and dependants.
5	Funding / Financial Support	PERSONAL	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Adequate funds to be made available in cash as well as in bank. 2. Quick and transferable ways for money transaction to be made available. 3. Create source of money generation for the moment of emergency.
6	Psychological Maturity	PERSONAL	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Motivation by self is a very good medicine for self and others. 2. Listening to people or mentors who can induce motivational essence in us. 3. Practicing the intention of taking things of ease and exercising during the crisis would develop strong Psychological Maturity in us and among others through us.
7	Social Networking	PERSONAL	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Keep the social networking in usable condition. Avoid unwanted contacts that put our positive energy down. 2. Develop the contacts who can really help you in crisis. Share their credentials to your families and dependants. 3. Help genuinely others when they are in crisis that would build a good and trustable network for us.
8	Readiness for Emergency Situation	PERSONAL	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Keep your Body with good conditions. Avoid foods that harm your lifestyle. 2. Work for the required stuff. Company will not come to you when you are down, but family will.

			3. Keep all the basic medicines ready, details about nearest health centres and accessible resources ready during exigency period.
9	Transparency to the immediate dependants	PERSONAL	1. Keep Informed your spouse or immediate family and dependants about your financial savings and investments. 2. Don't keep any surprises to your family and dependant about your loan and payables to anyone or to any firm. 3. Educate your spouse or Family and dependants on how to live a respectable and genuine life even in emergencies.
10	Positivity Approach	PERSONAL	1. Listen always to positive speeches. 2. Practice more positive thoughts that would leverage the mileage in us and within others. 3. Develop an atmosphere of Positive Ambience around us amidst of any situations.

5. CONCLUSIONS

We live a life of uncertainty. There are few things we can control directly, and few cannot be controlled. Those that cannot be controlled need to be managed. We have left with two options. One is by CHANCE and other is CHOICE. Option 1 – CHANCE BASED LIVING is what we will be caught in a situation where our decision taking would go for a toss and led by situation. There is no certainty of future in this option. Always we tend to depend on someone or something that are strange to us. This will lead to an unproductive outcome. The lifestyle would equivalent or worser to pathetic state. On the other hand, when the Option 2 – CHOICE BASED LIVING is chosen, our decision will be managed and controlled by ourselves. We have certainty of the future. At least we will be prepared to face the uncertainty. Instead of depending on someone or something, we have the capability to manage our own need and can out with emerging and winning person. The productivity will be higher and leads to greater level of quality to our professional life, business, customers, and to our family. With the given and available ingredients, we can live a healthy, safe, sound, protected and blessed life. It is very evident that when the Remediation Plan of Action due to Impact of COVID is deployed religiously, we will be assured not only a healthy and safer life but also the employee will have a higher grade of Employee Engagement at all the environments for sure.

REFERENCES

- [1] Robert J. Vance, Ph.D. (2006). Employee Engagement and Commitment. A guide to understanding, measuring, and increasing engagement in your organization. SHRM Foundation.
- [2] Li Sun (2019). Employee Engagement: A Literature Review. International Journal of Human Resource Studies, ISSN 2162-3058, 2019, Vol. 9, No. 1
- [3] Daiva Budriene and Danuta Diskiene (2020). Employee Engagement: Types, Levels and Relationship with Practice of HRM. Malaysian E Commerce Journal (MECJ) ISSN: 2616-5155 DOI: <http://doi.org/10.26480/mecj.02.2020.42.47>
- [4] Schrita Osborne and Mohamad S. Hammoud (2017). Effective Employee Engagement in the Workplace. International Journal of Applied Management and Technology. Volume 16, Issue 1, Pages 50–67 Walden University, DOI:10.5590/IJAMT.2017.16.1.04
- [5] A. N. Meyer; G. C. Murphy; T. Zimmermann; T. Fritz (2021). Enabling Good Work Habits in Software Developers through Reflective Goal-Setting. IEEE Transactions on Software Engineering. ISSN: 1939-3520.
<https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/stamp/stamp.jsp?arnumber=8823032>

- [6] X. Cai; J. Shang; Z. Jin; F. Liu; B. Qiang; W. Xie; L. Zhao (2020). DBGE: Employee Turnover Prediction Based on Dynamic Bipartite Graph Embedding. IEEE Access. ISSN: 2169-3536. <https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/stamp/stamp.jsp?arnumber=8955788>
- [7] S. Macias-Velasquez; Y. Baez-Lopez; A. A. Maldonado-MacÃ-as; D. Tlapa; J. Limon-Romero; J. L. HernÃ;ndez-Arellano (2020). Working Hours, Burnout and Musculoskeletal Discomfort in Middle and Senior Management of Mexican Industrial Sector. IEEE Access ISSN: 2169-3536 <https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/stamp/stamp.jsp?arnumber=9025192>
- [8] Susan Stamm (2012). 42 Rules of Employee Engagement. Super Star Press. ISBN 978-0-9799428-9-1 Silicon Valley, California, USA Library of Congress.
- [9] Donna Carnahan CRNA, MS (2013). A Study of Employee Engagement.University of Michigan-Flint. CRNA Employee Engagement/Job Satisfaction and Retention.
- [10] Clint Swindall (2011). Engaged Leadership, 2nd Edition. John Wiley & Sons, Inc. ISBN 978-1-118-03377-7 Hoboken, New Jersey.
- [11] Janis Allen, Michael McCarthy (2017). How to engage, involve, and motivate employees. CRC Press. ISBN 9781315154954 Taylor & Francis Group.
- [12] Tracy Maylett, EdD and Matthew Wride, JD (2017). The Employee Experience How to Attract Talent, Retain Top Performers, and Drive Results. John Wiley & Sons, Inc., ISBN 978-1-119-29420-7 Hoboken, New Jersey.
- [13] Joanna Barclay (2015). Conscious Culture. New York. ISBN 978-1-63047-154-5 New York, by Morgan James Publishing.
- [14] Jacob Morgan (2017). The Employee Experience Advantage. John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 9781119321651 (ePDF). Hoboken, New Jersey
- [15] Christine Antunes, Christophe Korda, Philippe Korda and Suresh Mistry (2010). Leading Strategy Execution. Kogan Page Limited. ISBN 978 0 7494 6056 3 www.koganpage.com.
- [16] Peter Kreeft (1991). You Can Understand the Bible. Ignatius Press. ISBN 1-58617-045-7 San Francisco.
- [17] John C Maxwell (2007). Be a People Person. David Cook. ISBN 978-0-7814-4843-7 Victor Books, Cook Communication Ministries.
- [18] Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend (2001). How People Grow. Zondervan. ISBN 10: 0-310-319 -56 0 Grand Rapids, Michigan 49530.
- [19] John C Maxwell (2009). How Successful People Think. Center Street. ISBN 978-1-599-95215-4 Hachette Book Group, Inc.
- [20] Stephen R. Covey (2003). The 7 habits of highly effective people personal workbook. Franklin Covey Co. ISBN10: 0-7432-6703-6 Touchstone, An Imprint of Simon & Schuster, Inc.
- [21] John C Maxwell (2009). The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership. Maxwell Motivation, Inc. ISBN 0-7852-7431-6 Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville.